

# *The Refugee Problem*

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*The views expressed in this article are the author's and are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army or the Command and General Staff College.—The Editor.*

**F**ROM the time of the Spanish Civil War, mass migrations of whole populations have been a normal concomitant of military operations, a phenomenon which the world had not seen since the seventeenth century, the period of the Thirty Years' War. More than half a million Spaniards crossed the Pyrenees in February 1939. A year later, in the south of France, shelter was sought from the German invasion by Dutch, Belgian, and French refugees. In the second half of the last war, the inhabitants of whole regions in Eastern Europe fled in terror from the Communists. Similar catastrophic happenings have taken place in Korea. Only those who have witnessed and experienced these mass migrations can imagine what such gigantic movements of peoples are really like.

## **Reasons for Mass Migrations**

Why do millions of human beings abandon their homes and deliver themselves

up to an uncertain fate? It is a phenomenon of mass psychology caused, in some instances, by the fear of bombardment; in others, by a dread of the enemy's armies; and, more often still, by the prospect of living under the political régime that is likely to be imposed. Another factor connected with the problem is the total character of modern warfare, which tends more and more to develop into international ideological conflicts. The struggle does not end with victory on the battlefield, but is followed by the indictment of the enemy government as war criminals, and reprisals against a multitude of persons convicted or suspected of collaboration with the vanquished régime. Gone are the times when war was waged by armies only, when the civilian population figured as mere spectators, and when the occupying forces respected the laws, administration, and mode of life of the population of the enemy state.

## **Influence of Propaganda**

Propaganda is another factor that causes people to leave their homes. In order to influence public opinion in favor of the war aims, many stories are spread about the cruelties of the enemy. Although it may be necessary to condone such

***The problems inherent to the establishment of an international refugee organization are numerous and diversified because questions of a military, political, judicial, psychological, and social nature must be solved***

methods from a political point of view, they are likely to have a boomerang effect in case of retreat. The passionate hatred of the enemy, engendered by propaganda, then changes into a state of panic which drives people into flight. Today, when passion has, to a great extent, subsided, it can be admitted that there was quite a deal of exaggeration in what was said about the German occupation. It was the reverse in the case of the Soviet Army, about which, until the end of the war, only praise was heard.

### A Hypothetical Problem

A migration of peoples, such as the world has never yet witnessed, would take place in case of a Communist invasion of Europe. Germans, Dutch, Belgians, French, and many other nationalities—children, old men and women, on foot and transported by every imaginable kind of vehicle—would clutter the roads of the Western countries. Such a mass movement would bring many problems, some of them so gigantic that their solutions would appear to be dubious. Supposing that the number of refugees, amounting to 7 to 10 millions, exceeded the combined strength of all the Allied fighting forces, what direction would these fleeing hordes take? Those seeking to embark for England, America, or Africa doubtlessly would head for the French Atlantic ports. Others probably would strike toward the Swiss and Italian Alpine passes in the hope of reaching Sicily as a stepping stone toward some other destination. Marseille and Toulon would attract those who desired to cross to North Africa. Many others, probably the majority, would head for Spain, with the object of seeking refuge behind the natural barrier of the Pyrenees. In dealing with our subject, we propose to examine the matter from the point of view of the latter supposition, inasmuch as it provides us with a typical problem which

might develop on an international frontier of great strategic importance.

From the military standpoint, the chief danger would lie in the blocking of important strategic communications lines, thereby interfering seriously with operations and, in some cases, even bringing them to a standstill. Unless severe measures are taken, defensive lines may be swept away by the sheer weight of the fleeing masses flowing like a tidal wave over them. Panic-stricken people have fertile imaginations. They spread all kinds of rumors, and their very presence has a disintegrating effect not only on the inhabitants of the rear areas but on the troops as well. Enemy agents and partisans can hide easily in crowds. In case of an invasion of Europe, the Soviet armies could cover their advance by a screen of millions of refugees.

### Phases of Wartime Migrations

In spite of the indescribable chaos which characterizes the stampede of fugitives, these modern migrations in wartime show three recognizable phases, which succeed each other almost like the echelons of an army.

*Phase 1.*—During the first 2 to 3 weeks, like an advance guard in front of the main body of troops, come the people of means who, as a rule, are better informed than the masses. They ride in elegant cars and their papers are in order. As, for the most part, they are financially self-sufficient, they do not cause any special trouble. They disappear quickly, easily finding accommodations in hotels.

*Phase 2.*—As the stream grows larger, things begin to get livelier. The luxury automobiles are followed by smaller and more modest vehicles, on which are fastened all kinds of boxes and bundles, and even bedding. In this group are to be found state officials and services, which have been evacuated officially, as well as members of the middle classes such as

doctors, engineers, and merchants. Ever greater grows the flood of nomads, and the number of trucks and motor buses increases as compared with private cars.

*Phase 3.*—The worst off are the refugees found in this phase. Without order or discipline in blind chaos, they occupy the whole width of the highways. In an endless chain, the heterogeneous mass of vehicles rolls on, carrying people of different classes of society, nationality, and age, together with their varied belongings such as furniture, sewing machines, and every imaginable kind of chattel. Horse-drawn carts block the way for motor vehicles, and often it takes hours before a passage can be cleared for them. The crowds of pedestrians also grow larger, many of them pushing their worldly belongings along in perambulators and carts, whereas others try to find a way by hiking across country. Often, deserters mix with the crowds—sometimes armed sometimes weaponless—some on foot, others riding on military vehicles. Demoralized, they strike a tragic note in the kaleidoscopic procession.

By leaving their homes, many of the refugees expose themselves to far greater dangers than they would encounter if they remained where they were living. As mentioned above, however, they are the victims of mass psychology. Seized by panic, region after region and village after village are swept along. Most people act under the influence of the steadily growing rumors and only decide to leave at the last moment when faced by enemy occupation. The major portion of the fugitives consists of women, old men, and children, politically insignificant, who would not have to fear any serious reprisals from the enemy. Acting under the impulse of panic, they drag with them those possessions on which they happen to lay their hands at the moment of departure. Instead of warm clothing and provisions, they load their vehicles

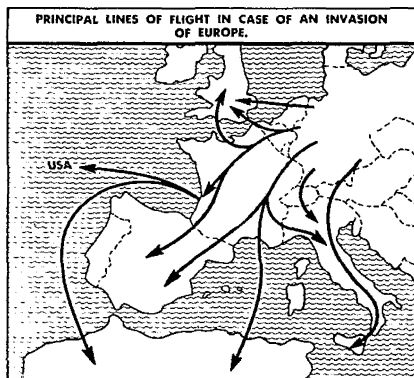
with junk of all kinds and items of no practical value during their flight.

### Control of Mass Migrations

To control such mass migrations is not an easy matter. These migrations comprise people who:

1. Are seized with panic and act irrationally.
2. Are imbued with the instinct of self-preservation. Consequently, they are so egoistically constituted that their aptitude to help others is reduced to a minimum.
3. Tend to become irritable because of hardships already endured, and because they are faced with the prospect of an uncertain future.
4. Are obsessed by an insensate jealousy of those better off than themselves. As a result, the lowest human instincts come to the surface.

Under such circumstances, the authorities, civil or military, who try to help, reap little thanks. On the contrary, they become very soon an object of hatred.



Anybody who is called upon to handle this problem primarily should take all these psychological factors into consideration while maintaining a profound understanding for all human weaknesses. These weaknesses are not characteristic of any one nationality or race; they would be mani-

fested by all peoples subjected to the same psychological influences.

### Preventive Measures

The measures to be taken against such chaotic mass movements of peoples should, above all, be preventive, which is, of course, only possible if they are adopted well in advance. It is especially important that a central board should be formed, with branches in all areas of the country, charged with the task of studying the problem closely and, at the same time, developing the necessary practical measures to cope with it. Press propaganda, radio broadcasting, and all other means should be used to dissuade the people from engaging in wild flights into the unknown.

It is the duty of the authorities to restrict the number of refugees to a minimum. Only those persons should be evacuated who are likely to suffer reprisals at the hands of the enemy, or who, for military or economic reasons, are likely to be of value to the war effort.

The Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 requires governments to designate, in advance, sanitary or neutral zones in a theater of operations. Thus, one of the preventive measures would be to demarcate clearly several safety regions, to be held inviolate by the armies. These zones would serve as sanctuaries for the protection of passive persons, generally speaking those who are incapable of military service and who would not be exposed to political reprisals. A local committee, supported by executive personnel, with police backing, should ensure the functioning of each of these zones, which would be subject to the authority of the Red Cross and representatives of the nonbelligerent states.

Whether such steps are likely to meet with success is a moot question as, especially during the days immediately preceding an occupation by the enemy, it is exceedingly difficult to reason with a panic-stricken community.

### Hypothetical Problem Continued

We will stick to our example and examine the problem from the point of view of a Soviet invasion of the West, involving the organization for the evacuation of refugees over the Franco-Spanish frontier.

The execution of such an operation would be facilitated considerably by an agreement between the two countries interested. Roughly, such a convention would have to be drawn up in such a way as to settle, among other things, the following matters:

1. The necessary co-operation between the civilian and military authorities of both countries, both on French and Spanish territory, together with the appointment of liaison officers.

2. The designation of routes by which the stream of civilian refugees and the retreating military units are to be canalized, together with the frontier crossing points.

3. The organization of the refugees in orderly columns and their being provided with foodstuffs and fuel, as well as the appointment of escorts in the shape of police or gendarmery responsible for their discipline.

4. Arrangements for the evacuation of refugees by railroad. (This is less practicable in the case of the Pyrenean frontier, as Spain and France have different rail gauges.)

5. The organization of sanitary services.

6. The security measures to be taken against politically unreliable elements, together with the prevention of an infiltration of enemy agents.

7. The problem of deserters. From the outset, it should be decided that all military persons, or small groups of soldiers, not under responsible control, should be considered as refugees. Such a rule would, in principle, apply to units smaller than a

battalion. The fate of such military personnel could be decided upon later.

It is clear that there exists a series of problems whose eventual solutions should be studied thoroughly months in advance. However, would any government be prepared to tackle such matters in advance at the risk of creating, by such preventive measures, a defeatist psychosis among its population? If the Soviets cross the Elbe, attempts, undoubtedly, would be made to stop them at the Rhine and then at the Seine or the Somme. If, on the other hand, they got as far as the Loire, it would already be too late. Again, it is probable that the Spanish Government which, by granting the right of asylum, would assume an enormous task and responsibility and, therefore, might adopt a waiting attitude until the last moment.

Be that as it may, whether or not the refugee problem is subjected, in advance, to consideration between the respective governments and the high command of the Atlantic powers, it certainly will arise in case of an invasion of Europe. If it is not possible to hold up the Soviets on the Elbe or the Rhine, within 3 to 6 weeks 3 to 5 million desperate people will be clamoring, more and more violently, at the doors of the Pyrenees and, unless appropriate measures are taken in time, will end by bursting them open by force. We have remarked already, and would repeat, that it is hardly within the power of man to find an entirely satisfactory solution of the problem. What should be done then in order to bring at least some semblance of order into the chaotic confusion and thereby save as many human lives as possible? As it is hardly likely that the necessary steps will be taken in anticipation of this catastrophe, we will act on the assumption that everything has to be improvised.

### Guiding Principles

In order to achieve our purpose, we shall have to conform to the following principles:

1. The solution of the problem can be sought only on a collective basis. There only can be one standard for all refugees, irrespective of their social status or nationality. However tragic the fate of many persons may be, the loss of time incurred by the individual treatment of separate cases easily could prove fateful for many others. Passports or similar documents, which, in normal circumstances, entitle the bearer to cross frontiers, can, at a certain stage, no longer be taken into consideration, either for lack of time or for reasons of security. Special cases can be dealt with later.

2. In order to prevent any demoralization of the rear areas and to make it difficult for enemy agents to carry on their activities, refugees not only should be kept isolated from the civil populations of the hinterland and the troops but all traffic between the various camps in which they are interned should be controlled and reduced to a minimum.

3. No state or army can provide the necessary means in personnel and material needed for the control, transport, and maintenance of the mass of fugitives suddenly appearing on the scene. For this reason, an organization should be created under the strict control of the responsible authorities and on which all able-bodied refugees should be made to serve, their vehicles being put to communal use.

4. The task should be undertaken with the utmost energy. In order to canalize the stream of fugitives in a certain direction, with a view to removing them from the scene of military operations as quickly as possible, it is often necessary to adopt justifiably Draconian measures.

### Influence of Terrain

Exactly as in military operations, the configuration of the terrain also has a decisive influence on the solution of the problem. What would happen in the case of our imaginary example? North of the

Pyrenees, the country is flat and, consequently, is abundant in communications and large localities. South of the Spanish frontier, the roads are less numerous and the main routes, in any case, would be reserved for military purposes. The townships are small and incapable of sheltering any considerable number of refugees. There would be great danger of congestion in the narrow mountain passes through the Pyrenees. For obvious strategic reasons, the Spanish Army probably would be forced to establish their advance positions at least 50 miles in front of the Pyrenees, partly in order to take in the exhausted retreating Allied troops before the narrow mountain passes are reached. In these forward areas, the organization for the control of the fugitives would have to begin its work. The operation could be divided into three phases:

1. Pre-Pyrenean arrangements.

2. The canalization of the migrating masses through the passes behind the Pyrenees into transit camps.

3. The transport of the refugees from the transit camps deeper into the hinterland and to camps of a more permanent nature.

### Instructions to Refugees

Uncertainty is a state of mind to which fugitives easily become victims. We have mentioned already how quickly rumors spread, causing panic and disorder. To avoid this, the refugees should be told what to expect and how to behave. This can be done by distributing printed leaflets containing the following instructions:

1. You are subject to the jurisdiction of the country offering asylum.

2. All directions of the competent authorities are to be strictly obeyed.

3. All persons crossing the frontier do so at their own risk.

4. In view of the large number of destitute persons, neither food nor lodging can be guaranteed.

5. All movement of displaced persons is restricted to designated roads. (These roads should be listed, together with any special markings.)

6. No one should proceed beyond 1,000 yards on either side of the above mentioned roads. Anyone found outside this zone will be punished.

7. Any modification of the regulations mentioned above can emanate only from the recognized authorities.

8. Fugitives can cross the frontier only at designated points. (It would facilitate matters if a map were provided in order to enable the fugitives to find easily the roads and the crossing points.)

9. The authorities call upon everybody to maintain peace and discipline.

10. In order to prevent traffic blocks, columns not marching in proper order will be diverted to side roads.

With the object of directing the movements of the refugees, large numbers of police and gendarmery should be stationed, in advance, at suitable points. At all important crossings, control posts should be established to observe and regulate the flow of refugees. The authority, whose task it is to deal with the problem, should be kept informed at all times regarding the strength and direction of the moving masses, for which purpose aircraft can be used for observation. Pickets should be stationed to prevent the crowds from using roads of military importance, and from infiltrating across country between the specified routes.

Additional measures to be taken energetically include:

1. The organization of vehicles in groups of 100, which should be split up again into smaller units.

2. The placing of each group in the charge of qualified refugees whose orders must be obeyed. In principle, there should be one controller for every five vehicles. Wherever possible, former policemen or

members of the military should be appointed to these posts.

3. The carrying of only absolutely essential loads. Refugees should be distributed evenly among the vehicles, accommodations being found especially for elderly persons, women, and children.

4. The distribution of all available motor fuel in such a way that all vehicles can keep moving.

5. The diversion of all horse-drawn transport to separate roads.

6. The holding up of all columns not complying with the above measures until the regulations are followed.

### Identification

For reasons of security, it is advisable to have several hundred counterintelligence agents disguised as refugees mix with the crowds for the purpose of observing and detecting suspicious persons, to whom the attention of the authorities should be drawn. It would be practically impossible to subject each refugee to an examination at the frontier posts. Interrogations taking 5 to 6 minutes a person are of no practical value, apart from the fact that, in the case of large numbers of refugees, many days and weeks would be required for the purpose. Furthermore, the sudden halting of the refugees at the frontier posts would cause congestion all along the routes which could result only in chaos.

In order to carry out a partial check, it may be more advisable, when issuing the leaflets described above, to distribute numbered leaflets, to be filled in by the refugees themselves. The information should include the name, nationality, profession, and details of the refugee's last domicile. These particulars would be required by the nation granting asylum. Such forms could be completed in quadruplicate, each being printed in a different color. The first copy would be surrendered at the frontier, the second in the transit area,

the third in the final camp, and the fourth would be retained by the refugee. Children under 10 years of age should have tallies tied round their necks for identification.

As many refugees pick up, on their way, a variety of weapons, their disarming is an important matter. Notices, posted along the roads, should point out that anyone found possessing fire arms will be looked upon as a partisan. Rifles or pistols should be allocated only to the police or the military. Collecting points for arms should be created along the roads, at frontier posts, and in the camps. Warnings should be issued repeatedly as it is certain that many refugees will try to hide their weapons.

### The Transit Area

An area, consisting of an appropriate number of transit camps, should be established at a distance of from 40 to 50 miles behind the front line. Here, the preliminary sorting out of the refugees takes place. This is done, based upon certain specified criteria such as nationality and age groupings. The principal aim, however, is to get all the refugees out of the operational area as soon as possible. For this purpose, perhaps it would be advisable to regroup them according to the categories of their vehicles. Each transit camp would be divided into several zones, in which trucks, motor cars, motor buses, and ambulances would be parked separately. This would facilitate the organization of homogeneous columns in which all vehicles would have the same general characteristics. [In the hypothetical example of the refugee migration from Western Europe over the Pyrenees, it is supposed that most of the people would use road transport.]

In order to make full use of all vehicles on a collective basis, they should be requisitioned accordingly in the transit area. They would be required for:

1. The transporting of all refugees to the hinterland; this means including those

without their own vehicles. All motor buses, and the greater part of the motor cars and trucks, should be used for passenger transport. They should be organized for continuous traffic between the transit area and the hinterland until the evacuation is completed.

2. Coping with the numerous other tasks arising in connection with the evacuation and administration of the refugees. A portion of the vehicles reserved for the authorities is used for:

a. Provisioning the refugees. Each camp must prepare its own transport unit for this purpose.

b. The different administrative activities, such as road traffic control, camp management, and security and sanitary services.

### Self-Help

As we already have mentioned, in wartime, no nation is in a position to provide all that is required for the evacuation of whole populations. Therefore, the refugees themselves must be made to help in every way, and all persons with the necessary qualifications—professional or physical—to carry on useful tasks, should be called into service. It should be remembered that the administration of several hundred thousand or even millions of human beings calls for an organization of several tens of thousands of individuals. It is obvious, therefore, that the greater part of those who will make up this organization must come from the ranks of the refugees themselves. On an average, about 15 to 20 supervisors are required for every 1,000 displaced persons.

As and when the refugees arrive in the transit area or in the hinterland camps, a census should be taken to uncover the following skills:

1. Chauffeurs and mechanics. Wherever practicable, these persons should remain in charge of their own vehicles.
2. Persons whose education fits them

to function in the administration of the camps, in supply, or in other services.

3. Police personnel to perform such duties as maintaining order, controlling traffic, and guarding depots and supplies.

4. Doctors and nurses to organize a health service.

5. Engineers and technicians to be made responsible for the maintenance of roads, the construction of camps, and the supply of water and electricity.

6. Nonspecialists, who are physically capable, who could be organized into units such as labor companies, not only for the purpose of assisting in executing the tasks mentioned above, but also be called up for other duties whenever and wherever necessary.\*

Printed notices should be posted to make known the categories of individuals required, and where they are to report.

The sojourn of refugees in the transit area should be limited to 24 to 48 hours, the time required for regrouping. When the transport columns are ready and the roads are free, the evacuation should go ahead.

As regards the administration of the camps themselves, it is an unfortunate fact that, in these times, their organization and administration are only too well known, and we need not, therefore, enlarge on the subject. We merely would add that for 100,000 refugees, at least 5 camps are necessary.

### Other Problems

Complicated as the measures described above may be, there are problems of a material nature which are much more difficult. For every 100,000 persons, 200 tons of foodstuffs and supplies are required each day. Their evacuation into the hinterland, and the upkeep of the administrative machinery would call for an enormous quantity of fuel. Without medicines and



medical instruments, the sanitary services cannot function. In each camp, barracks and roads have to be built, for which construction materials and tools are required. Cooking ranges are essential to provide mass feeding. What will be the source of all this material? What nation or international organization will supply it? These are the questions to which it is difficult to find satisfactory answers.

### Suggested Solutions

In each theater of war, there should be constituted, in advance, a special central organization to deal specifically with this refugee problem, at the head of which would be a central headquarters. In spite of the necessity to co-operate closely with the different military commands, it would appear, nevertheless, that a civilian, international body would be better adapted to handle the problems of mass evacuation rather than a purely military, if only for the reason that the transit areas and camps should, whenever possible, be declared neutral zones. Another reason is that the masses to be dealt with probably will be made up of many different nationalities.

Strong police forces should be placed under the direct orders of this responsible authority by the nation offering asylum. The setup of such a headquarters might be as follows:

*First Department (Personnel).*—This department will contain the records of all permanent officials employed or under the protection of the organization (refugees), the information office for all refugee inquiries, and the press service.

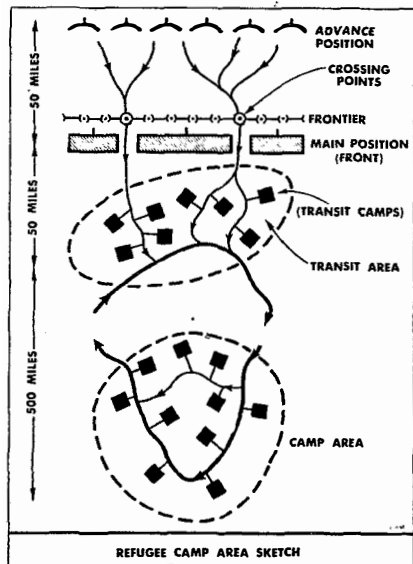
*Second Department (Security and public order).*—This department is concerned with the supervision of refugees, counter-intelligence activities, interrogation and the establishment of identities, the police, and the administration of justice.

*Third Department (Operations).*—This department is concerned with the carrying out of the evacuation, traffic control, and the administration of the camps.

*Fourth Department (Quartermaster and maintenance service).*—The supply of foodstuffs, fuel, building materials, and tools is the concern of this department.

*Fifth Department (Sanitary services).*—The function of this department is self-evident.

This outline of the headquarters of a refugee organization gives us a rough idea of how vast and diversified are the problems which have to be tackled. Questions of a military, political, judicial, psychological, and social nature are interwoven



closely with each other. Under the control of this central headquarters there should be subordinate headquarters functioning in all sectors of the field of operations, whose task it would be to keep in close touch with the army commands. As is the

case in normal military operations, there should be specially reserved wireless and telephone networks to ensure constant contact between the separate headquarters, traffic control posts, and camps. After the completion of the evacuation, parts of the

organization, especially those in the transit area, could be inactivated whenever redundant. The administration of the camps and the question of the final destination of the refugees would remain as final problems to be solved.

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**We have learned that without industrial preparedness, military forces alone are impotent. We are convinced that if war should ever come again, our great productive capacity and the proven ingenuity of our men and industry would assure us the means we would need to attain ultimate victory.**

*General J. Lawton Collins*